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W. J. DICKERMAN

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DICKERMAN PUBLISHING CO.

Boston and New York

James M. Smith

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A STORY OF MANY COLORS

or

Romance in a Lodging-House

By

W. J. B. STABB
=

DICKERMAN PUBLISHING CO.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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A Story of Many Colors

CHAPTER I

MR. THORNDYKE B. WHYTE, a young man, one and twenty or thereabouts, was one of a company of pleasure seekers at Nantasket Beach. By his side stood a maiden, whose natty appearance, fresh color and dainty movements disturbed yet delighted him. Every nice girl has an unconscious power of affecting a great many folks, young and old, in this sort of way, and this girl was a very nice girl indeed.

After regarding her for some time in silence and trying in vain to catch her eye, he remarked in a tone that sounded somewhat like a challenge : "A fine day, Miss Brown?"

The note of interrogation in the speaker's voice compelled a reply and the young girl, in a feminine superlative set him at his ease and confirmed him in his carefully considered opinion. He was consoled. She had spoken to him and she was not a girl who spoke very much to anybody. He could afford to relapse into taciturnity and the narrow range of his little world of self. He drew forth a cigarette and lit it with placid satisfaction. There were very few fellows that Miss Brown entered into conversation with, hardly one in fact, except that incorrigible old monologist, Caleb A. Black,

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and another, a bearded fellow, who seemed to worship the very ground she trod on. Mr. Whyte did not mind old Black, a man of sixty, but the bewhiskered personage irritated him because he was a much younger, although a staid looking man, and on the present occasion had been permitted to carry her luncheon basket. Turning his head a little to keep the smoke from annoying her, he espied the object of his dislike seated on the sands near the young girl's mother and a group of persons, whose names may as well be given here by way of introduction.

Besides Mrs. Brown there were two ladies, one, an elderly spinster, Miss Leah Philopoea Gray, the other, a lively milliner, Miss Sophy Scarlett. Besides the gentleman with the hirsute honors, who may be designated as "The man in the Background" (M. I.B.G.), there were Caleb A. Black and two students, Rondibilis C. Blue (called Rondy Blue, for short) and Galen D. Green, his *Fidus Achates*.

Mrs. Brown, a good-natured, stout, optimistically-minded sort of body faced a luncheon basket and ate and drank with vigor if not with precision. Miss Leah P. Gray, attenuated, sharp of feature, irreproachable in dress, exceedingly communicative and perpetually trying to do something for everybody to set them at their ease, as it were, pressed the comestibles, with a running commentary on the merits of such as were of home manufacture, upon the attention of her guests.

Sophy Scarlett, vivacious, coquettish, sprightly, modish, with a hat like a flower garden, and

shoulders spread out as if in the support of the huge superstructure, kept her feathers in constant vibration as she talked, apparently, to everybody at once.

Caleb A. Black, of most decorous demeanor, looked in the direction of Plymouth Rock with meditative gaze, pondering on the advent of the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, and mentally comparing the configuration on the map to a gigantic hand and arm ready to seize upon the poor exiles and endow them with new life drawn from the generous bosom of Massachusetts.

Rondy Blue and Galen Green, long-haired and with indications of having drunk very sparingly at the Pierian Spring as yet, were dressed in tweed suits and flat caps and jostled each other and laughed and said smart things with the zest that belongs to the period of self-satisfied adolescence.

Of the M. I. B. G. it behooves us for the present to say little more than that his capillary appendages enshrouded him with a dervish-like gravity. Mr. Thorndyke B. Whyte did not give expression to his feelings as he sulkily turned his gaze back to the smooth, peach-like face at his side, but smoked his cigarette with an energy little short of vindictive. Some smoke, consequently, was wafted across the sensitive nostrils of his little neighbor, as the wind blew in that direction, and was the occasion of a remonstrative little cough. "You would never make a smoker," said the young man.

"No, indeed; it appears to me to be so unnatural. What did men do before tobacco was dis-

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covered? And as for the appearance of the thing, I think a pipe or a cigar spoils the beauty of the handsomest face ever seen."

"Handsomest face?" What did she mean? Mr. Whyte was vain, inordinately vain. He experienced no difficulty in assuming that his own was the "Handsomest face ever seen." "If you put it in that way, Miss Brown, here goes," and he threw away his cigarette, to the delight of small boys who had a lively scramble for it.

A quizzical expression irradiated the girl's features for a moment. "I should indeed be sorry if, perhaps, my silly prejudices interfered with your pleasure. But I must own to a number of odd ideas. I cannot imagine, for instance, why people should drink unless they are thirsty. I think it is so very unnatural." More food for reflection. This was certainly a very original young lady. That very day he had imbibed a Manhattan cocktail which, under this view of things, he felt he had no reasonable warrant for taking.

He recalled with remorse his reflected image, the image of the "handsomest face ever seen," as he gracefully crossed his feet, his elbow resting on the bar, and smiled, Narcissus-like, at the fair view presented in the large mirror facing him.

Crisp in speech and to the point, of a practical and reasoning character, rather than imaginative or sentimental, Euphemia's unimpassioned intercourse with various suitors whom she entirely failed to understand, and who, it is almost needless to add, failed to understand her, no pledges of any

kind or even complacent encouragement of attentions could have construed into what her volatile friend, Sophy Scarlett, would have termed a "friendly understanding."

In music her forte lay in assiduous application and undeviating regard for the metronome, not in that delicate and expressive touch that creates dream upon dream for the enraptured hearer; and she had no voice for singing. In typewriting and shorthand, however, her success was marked, and at the present stage of her life were enlisted in aid of the domestic exchequer.

A regretful look or two at his cigarette case, and he, as luck would have it, perceived that her shoe-string was untied. Drawing her attention to the straying ribbon he proceeded gingerly to tighten and secure it. The lingering adjustment served to make him very nervous; her ankle and diminutive foot were so perfect.

When he got to his feet again he took a good look at her and more unabashed, as, wrapt in her own thoughts, the episode of the shoe-string, which had so shaken him, did not cause her the least disturbance.

Of a verity she was pretty, nay, beautiful. How harmoniously put together; what exquisite contour,—the arm full at the shoulder, well rounded to the elbow; a dimple there, and what a rosy look through the muslin sleeve.

"An arm fit for a sculptor, — yes, for a sculptor!" exclaimed the young fellow, carried away with enthusiasm.

"That is what Mr. Black says," observed Euphemia simply, and forthwith moved the sculpturesque limb into various positions and inspected it critically. This was done without any show of vanity or indication of self-conscious coquettish instinct. The swelling waves breaking with a swash upon the beach seemed of greater interest to her. "I see Miss Gray coming this way," she continued. "Let us meet her."

The slim lady referred to, on hospitable thoughts intent, was hastening towards them. "Oh, you must both be famished. Have something to eat, do, and the cakes now I made myself." To this appeal the twain were fain to accede and leisurely strolled towards their friends.

Nantasket Beach was a gay spectacle, with the patient donkeys in their picturesque trappings; the numerous flags fluttering greetings of liberty to the wooing breeze; the chutes crowded with daring adventurers amid boisterous merriment; the whirligigs in full career; the infectious laughter of the bathers, mermaids and mermen, or, naiads, nereids, sea-nymphs, whichever you will, sporting in the water amongst the ever-breaking billows; the little tots, bare-legged, like so many semi-cupids, paddling about on the creamy fringe of the mighty ocean; in the distance, yachts, ships and steamers. It was all very beautiful and the sweltering heat of the city was forgotten.

The addition of Euphemia to the little group, regaling themselves on the sands, extorted a hearty welcome. This young girl seemed born to arrest

attention. "Sit down here, near me," cried Rondy Blue.

"You get out! Sit near me, Miss Brown. Don't mind him," pleaded his friend Galen.

"I think Miss Brown would prefer my camp-stool," said Mr. Black with dignity, ready to surrender the seat of honor. The modest "bearded like a pard" fellow said nothing, but if looks meant anything, his mute invitation was as strong as that of the others, as he edged away from Mrs. Brown to make a place for her.

"Well," cried Sophy Scarlett, just the least bit jealous, "the way these men make a fuss about you beats me. Why, when I went in the street car with you the other day and it was packed, they almost hit each other to make room for you, and I never got a seat after all. I think the reason must be that you don't make a fuss about them. Now I have a friendly understanding with one of those men I saw in the car that day,—not engaged, you know, only a friendly understanding,—and I am almost sure he saw me, only he was in the far end of the car and I couldn't get at him or I would have pulled his ear. He made believe to be reading the paper. What nonsense! These men always know who comes in the car, whether they have a paper or not. It is the pretty girls they see out of the corners of their eyes, not plain ones like me."

"Say, Miss Scarlett, how many friendly understandings have you had?" broke in the irrepressible Rondy, offering her an orange, which she accepted.

"You shouldn't be rude, Mr. Blue. But your tender years excuse you, if I don't."

"That's right," said Galen; "hit him hard. He deserves it. He thinks he can get up a friendly understanding himself."

"The idea!" laughed the good-humored Sophy, with her teeth in her orange.

Miss Leah Philopoena Gray, that charming old maid,—bless her!—had discovered, in the meantime, a fresh subject for her restless energies.

A youngster, with curly locks, blue eyes fast suffusing with tears, and a quivering lip, was helplessly struggling with his stockings, trying to haul them over his chubby legs clogged with wet sand. The spectacle had moved all the good spinster's sympathies, and there she was, soothing him, and dragging off the sticky hose, wiping the sand from his cherubic lower limbs and promising the little fellow, who was soon looking grateful, all sorts of cookies and nice things. It was philanthropy of the genuine sort, exhibiting patience and long-suffering in the highest degree. How those stockings had to be beaten and stretched and wrung out! How the sand would persist in sticking around those little heels of his! Could the good lady ever get the youngster into his boots again? It reflects the greatest credit on those giddy youths, Rondibilis and Galen, that, after a wrestling match, as to who should get there first, they lent Miss Gray their timely assistance and got the youngster finally booted, if not spurred, and ready to resume a respectable style of locomotion. It was after this

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exhibition of chivalry to a maiden in distress that our youths both at the same moment felt themselves impelled to further knightly courtesy. There was no mistake about it, Miss Brown's shoe-string was adrift again. Mr. Thorndyke B. Whyte's propinquity to that bewitching instep, which had so unnerved him, and probably the young lady's subsequent movements had loosened the knot tied by his trembling hands.

"Say, Rony, I'm going to tie that shoe." "No you ain't." "Yes, I am." Amateur acrobatics followed. They rolled and tumbled like young bears, went at each other as if at a game of football only to find when they reached their goal, the same goal in this instance, that the ground was taken up, for another pair of eyes had seen the grand opportunity.

The M. I. B. G. had spread a handkerchief on the sands and was kneeling upon it before his idol.

"Don't trouble, don't trouble, please," said Euphemia. Trouble! If she only knew the profound pleasure it gave him to perform the slightest service for her.

"Never mind her," cried Mrs. Brown, "Phemy's shoe-strings were always a bother."

"Now I suppose if it was my case," said Sophy Scarlett, "I'd have to fix it myself. Of course my feet are not quite so fetching," and she cast a look of comical disgust at them.

When the M. I. B. G. had accomplished his self-imposed task, any scientific gentlemen, armed with a microscope, might have detected a very suspicious

moisture about the bow or knot on the pretty little shoe, not of course of tears but more indicative of a chaste labial salute. No one, however, but the M. I. B. G. himself could give positive evidence about this; certainly not Euphemia, who was now all ears for Mr. Black, that gentleman with a fierce preliminary cough or two getting himself ready for one of those famous harangues, to which his little audience always listened with exemplary patience.

Strephons and Chloes, Corydons and Pastorelles with Sir Calidores in the background had no interest for Mr. Black.

CHAPTER II

CALEB A. BLACK was, the Sunday afternoon following the excursion to Nantasket Beach, taking one of his favorite strolls through Boston Common. It was his custom to enter near Shaw's Memorial (that unique and admirable work of art) as he rented a furnished room near by from Mrs. Brown. Hence a few steps brought him within the sacred precincts of the historical ground and it would do your heart good to see how the little man would expand himself, his nostrils dilate, his eyes kindle as he seemed all at once to respire in the atmosphere of a bygone century. His love of country was intense; and with what pregnant issues was not the Common identified! Was it not on June 14, 1774, after the expulsion of the peaceful cattle, turned into a British camping ground? On Tuesday, April 18, 1775, did not soldiers, leaving barracks, assemble at the foot of this very Common and set out to seize American cannon and stores at Concord? But we all know how the scheme got wind; how the signal of the lanterns on Christ Church steeple gave warning of the march; how Paul Revere, after crossing the river in a canoe under the very guns of the war ships, mounted his steed and began his furious ride to Lexington to save Hancock and Adams, his continuous cry of "Up and arm!" "Up and arm!" thrilling the whole country through which he passed into a passion of desperate resolution. It was at the foot

of the Common, too, the over-confident red-coats used to practice firing at the target in the river.

It is related that on one occasion a countryman, looking on at their indifferent skill, laughed. He was challenged to show what he could do himself. Taking one of their guns he hit the mark to right, to left, and in the center, just as desired. To crown their amazement, he stated in a careless way that he had a son "to hum," who could throw up an apple and shoot the seeds out as it came down. Small wonder such fearful execution was done at Colonel Stark's dead line at Bunker Hill, where every shot must have told.

In 1776, on the evacuation of Boston by Sir William Howe, General Putnam landed at the foot of this very Common.

Caleb A. Black, if you would only listen to him, could tell you of all these things with a fervor, undiminishable, nay, even increasing with every repetition of the story. He would go on to tell you all sorts of things about the glorious old Common; how it was used as a place of execution in the early days, before the public gibbet was erected at the neck at the entrance of the town; how pirates were hanged there and even Quakers, aye, hanged and buried there; how, during British occupation, deserters were shot there, and while the barracks were building to shelter the troops from the severity of the winter, some of the soldiers themselves would die of the hardships undergone and be buried with the pirates and Quakers and deserters; but above all,—and his eyes would



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twinkle with delight,—how the little boys, when the bullying soldiers, camping there, destroyed their hills of snow used for sliding down to Frog Pond, went in a body to General Gage and boldly demanded instant satisfaction and got it. “Egad,” exclaimed the admiring officer, “These small fellows draw in liberty with the air they breathe.” Holding you with his eye, like Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner,” the enthusiastic old gentleman would enlighten you about the early history of his beloved Common: How one William Blackstone was settled on the peninsula when the Colonists came, for the Indians preferred the mainland, and that this peninsula was then known as Shawmut, the present Boston; how the said William Blackstone in 1634 sold all his interest in the aforesaid peninsula, except six acres, where the house stood, for thirty pounds, paid by householders in sums of six shillings or upwards; how after the purchase the town laid out a place for a training-field, afterwards used for that purpose and for feeding of cattle, the peninsula therefore and the Common having been bought and paid for by the townsmen; how,—and here the narrator would get greatly excited,—in dividing the town lands among themselves some little time afterwards, they were near losing the Common, but owing to the postponement of the meeting for that purpose to March 30, 1640, the Common was saved and the space of ground reserved from the caprice of either town or city officers. If you did not give credence to him (C. A. Black) go and read up

Shurtleff and you would find it word for word just as he had stated. And then he would start off into an account of a duel that took place near the great elm, on July 2, 1728, between Benjamin Woodbridge, a young merchant, and Henry Phillips, a graduate of the college at Cambridge, not about a woman, but a paltry game of cards; and how, fighting with small swords in the evening, Woodbridge was killed, when Phillips, who was slightly wounded, fled to France, and twelve months afterwards died of remorse at having, for a squabble over so trivial a matter, dispatched a human soul to Hades.

He was familiar with the history of the great elm itself, immortalized by Holmes, and if the young one now growing had "ears to hear," that hopeful young shoot must have been as well informed as he was himself. Mr. Black had by this time got as far as the railing enclosing it, and paused there, for he saw, entering the Common on the other side, Miss Leah Gray. The wily old strategist calculated that she would pass close to him, and he could open his guns and give her a good broadside about the grand old elm.

At such moments Mr. Black was a pleasant man to look at. Although leading the sedentary life of a bookseller and, we might add bookworm, he had a little bit of rosy color on each cheek, relieved by snowy side-whiskers, which gave him a very fresh appearance, as if direct from some country farm. He had never married, most likely because at no time of his life could he have afforded it, for he

had not the knack of making money, and, after all, one does need a little of that convenient commodity as a basis of genuine wedded bliss. But notwithstanding some harassing pecuniary difficulties he was on the whole a fairly contented man, fond of his books, and his Common, and his country, ready to do a good turn in any way except that of money, which he hadn't got; in despair sometimes over overdue notes, but elated when a crisis was tided over by renewal or accommodations, or, worse than all, mortgages on his stock, to those enterprising velvety-steel gentlemen, Messrs. Leasem & Company.

The band was playing on this Sunday afternoon and people of all sorts and conditions lounged near the pavilion, reading the illustrated papers, chatting and laughing, some of them, or, the more silently disposed, listening to the fine music filling the air with "linked sweetness long drawn out."

Mr. Black, who had taken up a strong position in front of the young elm, awaited the approach of his unsuspecting prey. He observed that she stopped before the blind man and his pug dog, so well known to frequenters of the Common, and dropped a coin into the basket suspended from the mouth of the patient animal. Then she resumed her progress towards him with a sort of preoccupied air, a tinge of sadness about it. Neither the band nor the people attracted her attention. Mr. Black noticed that her figure was very graceful, erect, yet flexible, with sloping shoulders clearly distinguished, not concealed under unsightly eleva-

tions of drapery such as Sophy Scarlett delighted in. At a distance she looked twenty years younger than she really was, but as she drew closer the pallor of her face, signs of care on the brow and the whitening of her hair, which was very abundant and fine, indicated an age not a decade less than that of Mr. Black himself.

Out came the deep guttural preliminary cough as she approached within hailing distance. Well did Miss Gray know that imposing sound and what it meant, but she had a liking for the old Coleridge-Johnson fellow, and usually followed the monologues with unaffected interest. On the present occasion, however, she had something of her own to say and so decided to take the initiative and by degrees lead up to the subject that was pressing on her mind.

"How do you do, Mr. Black; admiring your elm, as usual, I see. I was reading about it the other day, not this one I mean, but the famous one that was blown down in the great storm of 1860. It seems that when Washington visited Boston in 1789 he reviewed the troops here and stood under the tree just as he did when he took command of the American army on July 3, 1775."

Miss Gray paused for breath with a feeling of pride at the knowledge she had displayed, but a little dashed at the dismay plainly depicted on Mr. Black's countenance. That gentleman did not answer (his feelings overpowered him), but looked at her with a compassionate gaze that froze her very vitals.

"The tree you speak of is alive and well," said he, in a voice of mild severity such as he thought justifiable to a lady under the distressing circumstances, "and if you take the cars you can be assured of the fact for yourself in about half an hour. It is on Concord Avenue, in Cambridge, near the Common there."

"Oh dear! of course it is, and I was thinking of the wrong Common. The fact is, I am quite distracted to-day, Mr. Black. I want to consult you about a difficulty that I hope you can help me out of. Would you mind walking as far as the Public Gardens, where we can be comfortably seated?"

Mr. Black relentingly acquiesced and availed of the opportunity to fire off some small shot as they went along.

"Yes, Miss Gray, the grand old tree is gone. When the big branch was blown down June 29, 1860, at six P. M., they counted 190 rings upon it. This branch was probably growing in 1630, so that the tree must have been in existence before the settlement of Boston, according to the statement on the inscription placed by Mayor Smith in 1854, on the tablet in front of the railing. If there were talking elms as well as talking oaks the old chap could have told a great story. In 1784 it was called 'Liberty Tree,' the original 'Liberty Tree' on Essex Street having been taken down. Many real executions took place under its shade, and many tories were hanged in effigy on it." Mr. Black looked at his companion for approval, but

observing her inattention and a certain nervousness of manner, courteously, being a true gentleman, ceased firing and the pair walked on in silence.

They traversed the open space where ball was played on week days, now dotted with little groups, surrounding orators on theology and politics very much mixed ; crossed the street and entered the Public Gardens.

Here the scene was gay and enlivening. Instead of the stately elms, puritanic in their dignity, all kinds of arboriculture flourished, masses of rare and richly hued flowers charmed the eye, swan-boats glided over the lake, fountains played and everybody seemed placidly to yield to the enchantment of the spot.

" Shall we sit under this tree ? " said Leah Gray, selecting one out of many, but which seemed more secluded than the others, and better suited for the confidences she had decided upon making.

" You must know," she began, " that I am living on a little property left me in the shape of some small houses a few miles out of the country, with an acre or two of ground about them. I suppose you might call them little farms. Well, the rents I get just suffice for my simple needs. Sometimes the rents are in arrears, and I have to make it out by doing a little fancy work, for which, to tell you the truth, I get very little. Now last year a very dear friend, who thought I was much better off than I really am, asked me for the loan of \$200. I could not refuse him, and determined to raise the sum and called upon Leasem & Company forthwith.

The gentleman in the office was very polite, promised he would send his agent to view the house, examine the papers and see if one of his clients could not advance the money. I was overjoyed and told my dear friend that I would let him have the money in a week or a fortnight at the most, and he on his part promised faithfully to return it within a year."

"Ah!" interposed Mr. Black, "and he has not done it, eh?"

"No," answered Miss Gray, in apologetic tones, "the poor fellow had very hard luck,—you know how very hard the times have been, Mr. Black,—and where he is now I am sure I do not know."

"Sad, very sad," said Mr. Black, a little cynically, it must be confessed.

"But I must tell you my whole story," went on Miss Gray. "I called several times upon the polite gentleman, who seemed to be working very hard in the matter and have considerable difficulty in getting any one to come forward with the money, as the property, he said, was in such an out-of-the-way place. At last, however, he announced his success, and I signed my name to a document, undertaking to pay the two hundred dollars one year from date, or, in default, surrender the property. Now, as I thought my dear friend was sure to pay the money, I had no hesitation in signing the agreement. If it had been your own case, would you have had any, Mr. Black?"

"I don't know about that, Miss Gray. I should have been inclined to get some sort of security from your dear friend."

"But the poor fellow had literally nothing to give as security, Mr. Black."

"You are well named Philopoena, and are paying the penalty of friendship. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call on these people and try to get the loan carried along for another year. By that time, no doubt, your dear friend will be coming post haste to pay you the money. I can't put my hands on two hundred dollars just now, else you should have it. I have been very much crowded myself the last year or two and, like your dear friend, hoping for better times."

"Oh, Mr. Black, you are really too good. You have taken a great load off of my mind. You business men can do anything. I do so wish I was a man. You can't tell how nervous I was, going to that office day by day, and getting so many disappointments; and I so pitied that nice young clerk, he went to so much trouble about me, and I was so sorry to bother him. So you do know him?"

"I dare say I do," said Mr. Black.

"But his hair, Mr. Black; isn't it beautiful?"

"Bless his hair, Miss Gray."

"Oh, Mr. Black, I am quite surprised. You were going to say something else."

"Was I?" said the old man, a little savagely.

"Here, suppose we change this thing. You see that statue over there?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's Ball's celebrated Equestrian Statue of George Washington. There was a little conun-

drum about it once upon a time. See if you can guess it."

"What is it, Mr. Black?"

"Why is it smaller when it rains?" said he.

"Why is it smaller when it rains?" echoed Miss Gray, very much puzzled, "why, what difference can that make?"

"Do you give it up?"

"Yes."

"Why, because it becomes a statue wet, to be sure."

"Oh, Mr. Black, how funny. Did you make that up yourself?"

"No, I gave it to you to get your mind off that clerk's wig block."

"Now, Mr. Black, you are out of humor. I had no right to intrude my affairs upon you. But I was so disturbed about this unfortunate mortgage, and you looked so benevolent standing by the elm there, waiting for me, as I thought, that I plucked up heart of grace and told you all my trouble."

"Miss Gray, it was the highest compliment you could have paid me, and I wish I was more worthy of it. I never did such an act of self-sacrifice in my life as you have done for your dear friend, and you seem to be totally unconscious of it. Yours is such a nature that it would be utterly impossible to make you see that you have done anything unusual in going to such extreme lengths to help a friend."

"But you would have done the same, would you not, Mr. Black, under the circumstances? You

see, the poor fellow did not know which way to turn. He could not raise a single dollar, and I could. Put yourself in my place and you could not fail but have acted as I did."

"You have confirmed what I said just now, Miss Gray. It is impossible for you to see anything unusual in such quixotic generosity. May I ask you why Leasem & Company don't act by you as you acted by your friend?"

"Oh, Mr. Black, that is quite a different thing. They did not know me, and they can't live without money, you know, and that is the only way they have of making it, just like my collecting my rents. That young gentleman with the nice hair explained it all to me."

"That young gentleman with the nice hair," began Mr. Black, "is the greatest hum——"

"Hush! hush, Mr. Black! Naughty words again. Come, let us go home, and talk about the Browns on the way. They are in trouble something like my own. I will try and tell you about it."

So they resumed their peregrinations and directed their steps towards the abode of the little Euphemia and her mother; for Miss Gray also rented a room of Mrs. Brown, as, indeed, did Thorndyke B. Whyte and the M. I. B. G., and the gay Sophy Scarlett, as well as Rondibilis and Galen, who had one between them on the top floor and could disport themselves up there to their heart's content, there being nobody on the same flat to say them nay. This is how it hap-

pened that the little group at Nantasket Beach on that joyous holiday were so well known to each other.

"You see," said Miss Gray, "when Mr. Brown died he was uninsured and through sickness had been out of work a great while, and there was a heavy bill to pay the doctor, besides funeral expenses and house bills. Mrs. Brown was telling me this morning all about it. I had no idea they were in such distress. All that beautiful furniture they have got is mortgaged, Mr. Black, every stick of it. They had to do it to pay the debts after Mr. Brown's death. They got four hundred dollars on it and have been paying so much a month interest ever since, until very lately, when they fell back in their payments, and fines and extra interest have been on and they are warned that if the arrears and charges are not paid up, all the lovely furniture will be taken out of the house and sold. You know it made a great difference to them, Mr. Brown dying. He was a clerk, only earning about forty dollars a month, but it was a great help to the rent, and all the rooms were let in those good days, so that the family was really quite comfortable. Then Miss Brown, that is Euphemia, got a place as stenographer and typewriter close by, so that she could go home to her lunch every day, and, oh, Mr. Black! they were so happy. But now there is Mrs. Brown crying all day long and Euphemia in the lowest of spirits. It is sad, indeed, Mr. Black, to see a bright young thing like that so depressed."

"I never saw Mrs. Brown crying," said Mr. Black. "She seemed cheerful enough the other day on the beach among the chicken-pies."

"Oh, she has to keep up her system, else what could she do, Mr. Black? You never see her crying because you are away all day. But I am in the house a great deal, and it would break your heart to see her going around the rooms dusting and sweeping and fixing up things, the tears trickling down her old cheeks all the while. When Phemy comes home she cheers up a little or makes believe to."

"This is a hard world!" cried Mr. Black, the devil of pessimism getting the better of his usual jaunty philosophy.

"Of course," continued Miss Gray, "they could let everything go and take a room between them somewhere and depend upon Euphemia's earnings, about six dollars a week, she told me, for Mrs. Brown is no good for anything except looking after a house. But it would be dreadful, Mr. Black, after living so long in the old house, to leave it for a strange place. I know if it comes to that I shall miss them very much, and so will you, I think, Mr. Black."

"Well, Miss Gray, I cannot disguise the fact that matters are very serious. I will move heaven and earth to get time and have the mortgages taken out of their grasp. But not a word to Mrs. Brown. Promise me."

"There is my hand upon it, Mr. Black. Something tells me you will save her yet. Here we are at the door."

Mr. Black produced his latchkey and, admitting Miss Gray, followed her upstairs, where they separated, to seek their respective apartments.

Anticipating events a little, it may be said that a few days afterwards Miss Gray received the following communication :

“A friend's compliments to Miss Gray, and will Miss Gray rest under no apprehension with regard to the Leasem matter, which is being cared for.”

The address was typewritten and the enclosure typewritten. There was no clue either in the form or superscription to reveal her unknown friend, but she had no doubt in her own mind as to whom she was indebted, and a little flush kindled on her cheek that made her look quite young again.

CHAPTER III

Mrs. Brown, briskly hustling around her house, white cap upon her head to keep the dust from her silver-gray locks, and broom in hand, was very different from the Mrs. Brown we saw at Nantasket Beach amongst the chicken pies, trying to get all the good she could out of her well-earned holiday. You could hardly imagine so substantial a matron possessed so much activity. But the tyrant necessity brooks no drones. There was the care of six rooms to be considered, tenanted by the various personages in this little history, besides her own apartments and the halls and stairways. The ever-helpful Leah, rather delicate for work demanding robustness, assisted frequently in the lighter housekeeping, but the daily tale of bricks for her relentless taskmaster mostly fell upon herself, as Euphemia, engaged at the counting-house, could be of little service. Yet Mrs. Brown rarely grumbled, fond as she was of her ease. The thing that most oppressed her was the threatened seizure of her goods, of which she had, in great bitterness of soul, informed Miss Gray.

After the conference with Leah, already referred to, she dissolved in tears, but nevertheless persisted in her monotonous duties with unflagging energy. Her grief, unlike the effect produced on many of the daughters of Eve, did not mar her good looks, for she was still tolerably handsome; on the contrary, the pearly drops coursing down her face

were unaccompanied by redness of the eyes and contortion of the facial muscles.

Nor did her misfortunes cloud her understanding, for she was both a prayerful and resourceful woman and, as she swept and dusted and tidied the rooms, speculated on the possibility of some of her lodgers being able and willing to aid her. The youthful Rony and his friend Galen did not present any glowing attractions to her matter-of-fact mind, inasmuch as they were at that moment a little in arrears to her. Miss Gray had her own pressing difficulties. Sophy Scarlett lived well up to her income and perhaps over it. Thorndyke B. Whyte, although punctual in his weekly settlements, evidently spent much of his monthly earnings on personal adornment and the frivolities so seductive to a young bachelor. Nevertheless the sensible old lady pondered long over this possible source of succor. She knew of his passion for Euphemia, and felt that he would be well disposed to make a pecuniary advance to the utmost extent of his means, could she bring herself to ask him. But the fact that he was devoted to Euphemia made her, on careful reconsideration, dismiss this idea; for she well knew Euphemia, in a polite sort of way, only tolerated him, and to lay herself under monetary obligation, designedly, would place the poor girl in such a cruel position that her mother's heart rebelled against it. So that avenue of relief was cut off. With regard to Mr. Black she was very dubious. That fascinating old gentleman's clothes, although so neat and carefully brushed,

were always so glossy and threadbare. In paying his rent he was punctuality itself, but he was the antipodes of the millionaire in his style of life and surroundings. So she decided she would not heedlessly make a disclosure in that quarter.

The last and most mysterious of her lodgers was the M. I. B. G. who occupied one of her largest rooms and was very niggardly in the matter of speech, but otherwise paid his way like the gentleman and scholar that he was, if the learned and abstruse character of his literary tastes goes for anything. His apartment was fairly littered with books and pamphlets. A desk stood in one corner and besides writing materials and an incongruous mass of newspaper clippings, circulars, correspondence, small but very powerful magnifying glasses, acids and chemical paraphernalia, held a large box filled with specimens of ore. Above the desk was an extensive map of a mining region, underneath which appeared the announcement that the M. I. B. G. was the accredited agent of a mining company.

How easy it would be, thought the good woman, for this potentate to wave his magical wand and clear her dearly prized furniture of all encumbrances — but first she would see Mr. Leasem of Leasem & Company. Then, if no further grace was allowed, she would lay her big bundle of misery at the feet of her taciturn friend and humbly trust in Providence. The last mat in its place and the broom behind the door, Mrs. Brown was soon threading that part of the city said to be “the



LEAH

most densely populated area in the world." Moreover, it was bargain day and the crush was greater than usual. The street noises were deafening. The clatter of hoofs, rattle of wheels, ringing of gongs and thunderous progress of the electric cars, combined with the vociferous clamors of paper boys and pedlers, made her quiet home more dear to her than ever.

A Gargantuan policeman, around whom the sea of people seemed in a constant eddy, piloted her through the stream of traffic.

Miss Gray's nice young clerk was in strong evidence with his newspaper, listening to the report of two teamsters who, in vigorous phraseology, described the battle they had recently had with a gentleman and his wife over some furniture they had seized upon.

The dry, business-like tones of Mr. Leasem issuing from the inner office startled her. "Good-day. Call again. Pleased to see you," were the words she heard, and Mr. Leasem bowed out a new client who at that moment looked happiness itself.

The old lady rose humbly and bowed. Words did not come easily to her. At last she made known the object of her visit.

Mr. Leasem was very sorry, but all these things were in the hands of his partner, and he dared not interfere. Mrs. Brown had better arrange her installment and save any vexatious trouble and expenses in the meantime.

Mrs. Brown was not bowed out of the establishment. Even the clerk did not notice her as she

moved past him with a heart as heavy as lead, and tears, yes, fresh tears, wending their way in the course of their many predecessors. She turned her steps homeward, determined to get there before Euphemia could know of her absence, and to wash out the signs of grief before approaching the mighty M. I. B. G. upon whom now she anchored her hopes. The house was just as she had left it, but shortly after reaching it she heard Mr. Black's key turn in the door, admitting Miss Gray and himself. She heard the sound of their steps in the hall, afterwards the shutting of their doors upstairs, and then all was still and she felt herself as utterly alone as if in the bowels of the earth. The city and its turmoil seemed far, far away. Seated in her capacious rocking-chair she gazed at the photograph of her dead husband on its easel, an enlarged picture, purchased out of Euphemia's savings, and it may be forgiven the strong, practically minded woman if for a minute or two memories of the past overpowered her, and she wept afresh. But the clock was there, ticking away unconcernedly and recalled her to herself and present duties.

When Euphemia, escorted by the happy Whyte, who had managed to fall in with her in some apparently accidental fashion, arrived, her mother was resplendent in a silk dress, gold chain and modest jewelry. Mrs. Brown was this much a woman of the world that if she was going to ask a favor of a wealthy lodger she was not going to do it in a shabby gown and the indications of genteel poverty about her. The evening meal over, mother

and daughter looked at each other in silence. They had spoken so often of the great weight that lay upon their hearts that the subject was tacitly avoided. But at length Mrs. Brown said in an authoritative way, somewhat unusual with her, "Go to bed, Phemy. I am going to sit up." So Mrs. Brown was again alone in the parlor, stern as a Roman sentinel, alive to every sound at the front door, every footstep approaching seemingly charged with her fate. Time after time in her restlessness did she go up to her lodger's room to make sure he had not returned and slipped upstairs unheard by her. But no! all was darkness there. This night of all nights what made him so late? Ah, a step! two steps, three, four. Laughter, much noise; a great rattling at the door. Pshaw! she might have known. It was Rondy and Galen home from the theater. Wishing her a gay "Good-night" they bounded up the stairs two or three steps at a time. The clock struck eleven. Voices once more outside of the window and more steps, only to cease as they got out of hearing. But at last more voices and steps, and a pause at the door, but no movement of the latchkey. The voices fell to a whisper and there was a ripple of light laughter. How long was he going to stand chattering and fooling there, she wondered. One minute, two minutes, three, four, five. The suspense was almost too much for her. She must make some excuse to open the door, be outrageously rude, and break in upon his conversation with the unknown.

But joy of joys, the latchkey at last! Out into

the hall she came and turned up the gas till it flared. The light was dazzling. She knew she would be looking her best. The gold chain and the rings and the delicately-tinted silk dress! She was far from poor. She was rich, rich. Only temporarily embarrassed, and it being a case admitting of no delay, had taken the liberty of intruding upon him at this late, unconventional hour. It was all in her mind what she was to say and how she was to carelessly smile all the while as if it was a paltry thing of little consequence; only one of those things that might happen to anybody occasionally. And the door opened and the lively milliner sailed in. It was only Sophy Scarlett after all.

"Good-night, Mrs. Brown. One of my friendly understandings has been seeing me home. But how grand we look, Mrs. Brown. Whose birth-day?" and away she skimmed up the stairs, hardly waiting to hear the murmured reply. Again the clock! What utter folly sitting dressed up in that lonely room! Yet there she sat, dazed, thinking over and over the same dreary thoughts, looking on in imagination at her household goods scattered to the winds amidst brutal laughter, and the neighbors' pitying glances. She felt quite cold at last, and shivered. The morning must soon come; the house-work must be looked after; she must reserve her strength; and then she knelt down, sobbing like a child.

CHAPTER IV

THE M. I. B. G., upon whom Mrs. Brown depended as would some shipwrecked mariner on the polar star, had been disposing of some shares in the neighboring town and was coming from the railroad station on the following morning when he was accosted by Mr. Black and invited to breakfast at an eating-house.

So the gentlemen breakfasted and, being both healthy men of abstemious habits, felt satisfied with themselves and all the world when they rose from the table, for the steak was tender and nicely done; and, given these conditions, the process of digestion is eminently satisfactory.

The man of whiskers and mines was easily induced to bestir himself in the case of Mrs. Brown.

The heart of Mr. Black was completely taken by storm when his friend declared his intention of going at once to Leasem's and giving his check for the full amount of Mrs. Brown's indebtedness. Such princely generosity nearly took away his breath. All he could do was to take the two hands of the prince and shake them in silence. How was the simple-minded Black to know the secret springs at work within the breast of this magnificent philanthropist. Was the magnificent philanthropist cognizant of them himself? Well, yes, maybe just a little, for his mind was flooded with the vision of a fair girl, little more than a child, perfect in form and feature, with masses of chestnut hair, curling

naturally, and eyes of dark blue, clear and trustful. What mines of gold would he not give for such a prize? He hardly felt the pressure of Mr. Black's hands so absorbed was he in his bachelor's day dream.

"Yes, I will go to Leasem's at once," he repeated, and to his surprise Black said he was going there too.

"Oh, you needn't come, my dear fellow. I can do all that's needful there. This kind of thing gives me real pleasure. So, good-day to you, but I must entreat the most absolute secrecy. You know a breath of suspicion on the part of Mrs. Brown about my hand in this little affair would make me most uncomfortable and spoil the delight I shall feel in having been of some service to her — and — her charming daughter."

"Ah, you may well call her charming," said Black; "your secret is safe with me," and the old gentleman seemed to have an inkling of the true state of matters.

"But I have to go to Leasem's anyway on an affair somewhat similar. If you do not object we can go together."

"May I ask if I can be of service in this also?" said the M. I. B. G., with a side glance at the old gentleman's threadbare garments. Whereupon the delighted Black in trembling tones set forth all the story about Miss Leah Gray's noble but foolish conduct in the matter of the two hundred dollars; how words failed him to describe this heavenly creature, this woman of women; how

embarrassed he was himself, but that he had made up his mind so sell out and not cost that angel another pang if he could help it.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the M. I. B. G. "This is another affair for me."

"Oh!" said Mr. Black, "I will run away and tell her."

"No you won't," and a firm grasp was laid upon his arm. "You will oblige me by keeping this secret as inviolable as the other."

So this was how it came to pass that Miss Gray received the typewritten communication and thought that it came from Black.

CHAPTER V

THE well-stocked larder of Leasem & Company might be compared to a spider's web from which the chances of the fly escaping unless very lightly entangled are, to make the best of it, very small. Good Samaritans ready to snatch the struggling insects away are few indeed. Miss Gray and Mrs. Brown were among the fortunate ones. Not so the unfortunate Thorndyke B. Whyte, who, to keep up a good appearance before the world and at the same time pander to extravagant tastes, greatly beyond his means, had been tempted, like many a thoughtless fly, to rest for a moment in false security. He had borrowed money on the assignment of his salary, and was often hard put to it to pay the installment each month, exacted as interest.

Deeply enamored of Euphemia, he was desirous of looking his best at all times and spared no expense on his apparel. When enjoying the society of the Browns he talked of dollars in such a way as to lead the guileless women to suppose he was well furnished with them. On more than one occasion they had accepted his invitation to take them to the theater, where the young man with the beautiful girl at his side cut no small figure. No doubt he deserved to be envied by his less fortunate bachelor brethren. And yet had he known it, Whyte, for want of tact, or inexcusable ignorance of the high character of Euphemia's tastes,

had taken her to the wrong sort of play; there was too much vaudeville in it. He was delighted with it; she was simply shocked. The high kicking and the violent contortions of the body, so different from the graceful movements of ancient civilized and even modern savage races, made it quite painful for her to remain in her seat. But when she saw the evident pleasure this to her mind perfectly "unnatural" kind of thing had for Thorndyke, she refrained from the expression of disgust that sprang to her lips. Love, when not of quick birth by the laws of mutual attraction, is nevertheless frequently born more slowly of respect, and this respect the girl was far from feeling.

Not that she felt a decided contempt for him, nor even any emotion approaching dislike; only a sort of good-natured toleration not at all complimentary. As he treated her mother with great deference and sumptuous suppers now and then, Euphemia was too grateful to allow her indifference to his society to become very marked. She was very glad indeed whenever she saw him in the company of Sophy Scarlett, to whom he talked and seemed to be one of that frivolous young lady's "friendly understandings," although he would desert her in the most cavalier way for Euphemia at all times. This was about the condition of things between them at the time of the holiday on Nantasket Beach, but all was shortly to be changed and they were to be drawn closer together, owing to a pardonable mistake on the part of the Browns,

which placed him in the awkward position of appearing as their secret benefactor which indeed he was not. Euphemia had been sometimes deputed to carry notes to the office of Leasem, and on a recent occasion had met Thorndyke, who colored violently on meeting her, and altogether failed in maintaining that aplomb and self-possession upon which he so much plumed himself. The circumstance was mentioned to her mother and their minds had been greatly exercised over the nature of the young man's dealings with Leasem, and the reason of his marked confusion. The idea that Whyte was a needy man, as needy as themselves, never once presented itself as a possible solution. What! that gorgeous fly, involved like themselves in the toils of the spider,—impossible! And when, the day after Mrs. Brown's vigil in the parlor, a clean receipt was received from Leasem & Company, with the explanation that a sincere friend, who wished for important reasons to withhold his name for the present, had taken the liberty of interfering in their affairs, of whom could they think except Mr. Thorndyke B. Whyte, the man Euphemia had encountered on Leasem's threshold, the friend who was not entirely ignorant of their embarrassments as they well knew, and in whose room Mrs. Brown, in her character of landlady, had picked up a fragment of an envelope with Leasem & Company printed upon it.

Yes, he, and none but he, could be the nameless friend. Poor Euphemia, conscience-smitten, reproached herself for her indifference to him. What

right had she to judge or criticise the ignoble tastes of so noble a young man, so devoted an admirer! In the first blush of the revulsion of feeling thus brought about, she ably seconded Mrs. Brown in the proposal to receive him with open arms, as it were, when he returned from the business of the day, and make much of him, and thank him, and treat him as a being from another sphere. To what extent of worship will not a warm sensation of gratitude urge us all in the early stages of that beatific virtue.

When they heard his latchkey rattle, Mrs. Brown rushed to the door and almost embraced him, her eyes quite moist and voice almost inarticulate from emotion. And there was the beautiful Euphemia also, with glistening eyes and a most angelic smile of welcome on her face. But what ailed Whyte? Why hang back in such a shame-faced fashion? Ah! "Conscience makes cowards of us all," does it not, Mr. Hamlet? To think that he had deluded those two poor women with the glamor of his imaginary riches, and to be caught coming out of Leasem's! Could he ever have the face to talk any more of the wonderful subject known as "dollars?" He feared not. Silence was best at the present moment. He was going up the stairs, but Mrs. Brown burst forth with, "Don't leave us this way. We know all about it, Mr. Whyte."

"I saw you leave Leasem's, myself," said Euphemia, in bantering yet grateful tones. This was too much. Thorndyke B. Whyte was away out of

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sight like a swallow. Euphemia looked into her mother's face inquiringly.

"I did not think," said she at last, very contritely, "that he had so much delicacy of feeling. Dear mama, he is simply grand."

"I always knew it," said Mrs. Brown, in the decided tones which invariably indicate conviction.

CHAPTER VI

SOPHY SCARLETT's "friendly understandings" were not always limited to harmless flirtation. For Thorndyke B. Whyte she really had a genuine attachment. The innocency of the callow youth and the way he used to confide to her his griefs about the coldness of Euphemia interested her so much that she grew quite serious about him, and began watching him with lynx eyes. Young Whyte was very unreserved with the astute Sophy and did not stop with telling her about the ill-success of his suit. He often consoled himself in a hazardous sort of way by taking her to plays or treating her to ice cream, and as the two had many sentiments in common it is not to be wondered at that a sort of easy brother and sister like kind of friendliness grew out of that comradeship and they did not mind what they said to each other. There is no doubt that Sophy Scarlett reposed the most perfect confidence in Whyte's discreetness, for she said to him one night jokingly, between the acts of one of those hybrid performances so detestable from Euphemia's point of view, "Do you know, Thorndyke, you do not know the one-half of my 'friendly understandings.'"

"I dare say not," said Thorndyke over his high shirt collar.

"I have just contracted one with a gentleman who is making me pay dearly for it," said she.

"Who is that?" asked Thorndyke, in a lazily

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indifferent kind of voice, for he was thinking how nice it would be if he had Euphemia by his side instead of this parrot.

"Old Leasem," said the heroine of the various understandings, and she throw herself back on her seat, laughing heartily as if it was the funniest thing in the world.

Young Whyte's cheeks burned. All his composure deserted him, and Sophy, sharp as a needle, perceived it.

"I say, Thorny, were you ever very, very short of money? I often am," said she.

"Oh, I guess every fellow gets short sometimes," he replied.

"But I mean this. Did you ever have to go to fellows like Leasem to help you out?"

"Oh, I might have. Can't say."

"You bet," said Sophy, and the conversation dropped for that time. But a little later Sophy, over some oysters, again touched upon the subject, for her curiosity had been aroused. She was taking great interest in Whyte and his adoration of Euphemia was beginning to pique her.

"Well," said the young fellow pettishly, "if you must know everything, I am a little in with Leasem, but it will only be for a short time. I am going to have a good raise in my salary before very long. You told me about your scrape so I can trust you to keep mine to yourself, I suppose."

"Most certainly, Thorny," said the other softly.

"You know I should go mad if Miss Brown heard of it."

"Would you, indeed!" said Sophy to herself, and she relapsed into silence. The saloon they were in was small and they were all by themselves until joined by Rondy and Galen who came in discussing some subject in a very heated manner.

Sophy inclined her imposing headgear towards them and graciously permitted Rondy to take a seat at the table near her, Galen sitting opposite. The conversation, while some oysters were being served, was general, but, after that, taking advantage of a pause, Galen looked at Rondy, and Rondy looked at Galen.

"Tell them all about it. It was no harm, anyway."

"It was this way," said Galen; "Rondy and I were dead broke one night not very long ago, and we wanted to go to the theater. That wonderful dancing girl was there. Do you remember her name, Rondy?"

"No, not just now. But I say, Mr. Whyte, you were there with Miss Brown. Wasn't he, Galen?"

Thorndyke smiled with such pride and pleasure at the recollection that Sophy experienced a little pang and almost scowled at him.

"Well, as I was saying, we were both dead broke and time was short, and go we would, so what does Rondy do but grab one of my light overcoats—it was about the best coat I had—and dashes off for one of those places where they have the three gilt balls for a sign; you have seen them, Miss Scarlett?"

"Yes, I have seen them," said Sophy, her good humor returning.

"I ran after him as hard as I could, but Rondy is the deuce of a sprinter, you know, and got away from me like a bird. I got at him at last, though, but then he was coming out of the place I was mentioning, without my coat, but with a dollar and a half in his hand. 'It is all right, Galen,' said he, 'and here is your ticket. Let us have a drink the first thing.' Cool, wasn't it, Miss Scarlett?"

"Well," said Rondy, "I was thirsty, that's a fact, for Galen can run like sixty and only I got a good start of him he'd have that coat on his back at this moment.

"Yes, that girl danced like a marionette. You seemed to enjoy it, Mr. Whyte, as well as we did," said Galen, observing Thorndyke's lack of interest in Rondy's exploit.

Thorndyke did not reply. He was again, in fancy, seated by the side of Euphemia. Sophy Scarlett probably divined the secret of his abstraction. This more than "friendly understanding" of hers was getting to be quite an important problem.



EUPHEMIA

CHAPTER VII

THE days that followed Mrs. Brown's escape from the clutches of Shylock were memorable ones for Thorndyke B. Whyte. The grateful ladies could not do too much for him. The interest that the elder one took in his shirt buttons and superintendence of his hosiery generally was phenomenal; and the younger lady excelled herself in her efforts to entertain him.

"Do you like the 'Cry of the Children,' Mr. Whyte?" Euphemia would say to him. And Heaven forgive his perjury, he would swear that he did. Whereupon, to his astonishment, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's moving stanzas would be chanted in his ear. At his ease, in the softest of easy chairs, it was pleasant to see her shapely back and shoulders, and the abundance of hair falling gracefully over them; to watch the nimble fingers extract harmony from the cold ivory by the magic of their touch; to have the genius of Wagner or Chopin levied upon for his especial benefit; above all, to hug the thought to his breast that this devoted damsel but awaited his word to become all his own for life. But this word Mr. Thorndyke B. Whyte did not speak. There was some elfish trick about the whole thing. He thought at first they were poking fun at him; then, that they pitied him and wanted to be of practical assistance in his pecuniary troubles; more than once they tried to force money upon him in the most delicate way

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imaginable, as if they owed it. His vanity, great as it was, failed to satisfy him that this sudden conquest of Euphemia was brought about by ordinary means. What then was the extraordinary cause of it all?

The extraordinary cause of all, the self-sacrificing devotion of her bearded admirer, was unsuspected by either of them. The M. I. B. G. suffered the chagrin of seeing Thorndyke seemingly Euphemia's accepted suitor, he himself, the author of the comedy, reaping none of its benefits. That investment, made at the instigation of Black, in Brown stock, was turning out badly. He regretted his impetuosity over and over again, but yet, being one of your unostentatious, thoroughly good sort of men, took himself to task for envying the youthful pair their happiness, and tried to assure himself that if he was in any way the cause of it he ought to feel grateful, for he loved that winsome and sensible little girl with all the ardor of his generous nature. He often saw her when he was entering or leaving the house, for the parlor door being open afforded him an opportunity, and the feminine refinements of her surroundings enthralled his imagination. What dainty little ornaments were scattered about; what pretty little sketches and paintings adorned the wall; what tiny but rich-looking rugs, delicate draperies, wool-work and embroideries. Above all, what a well-informed mind was hers. Few books, indeed, to be seen, but what excellent ones. How different from the heterogeneous mass in his own den upstairs. And after such fleeting glimpses of

this paradise, the lonely man hied himself to his chamber, we regret to say, vehemently, desperately trying to extract peace and comfort from the seductive narcotic. There were supremely happy moments for him though, when they casually met and the dark blue eyes looked into his and the clear tones of her voice gave the morning or evening salutation. The eyes almost hypnotized him. Their dreamy depths, like the haunting mysteries of life, overpowered him and engendered an uneasy feeling in his breast, he fought against in vain.

And what did Thorndyke B. Whyte think of these same eyes? Was he overpowered in a similar way? Decidedly not. A woman's eyes were but a woman's eyes to him. Juliet's eyes were stars to Romeo. Euphemia's eyes were but human eyes to Thorndyke. He was not easily lifted out of the sphere of earthly realities, and would doubtless have preferred her eyes, "they, in her head," to remain there, and the mystical stars to go about their business, careless of borrowed effulgence. Yet he was not by any means sure of his position. He could not read the riddle she enacted before him. And until he solved it a meed of precaution was only right and proper. Who could advise him in this perplexity and condition of affairs so disinterestedly as the sapient Sophy, who had so many "friendly understandings" of her own on hand.

CHAPTER VIII

LEAH GRAY, after the receipt of the anonymous note assuring her of friendly protection in the Leasem matter, surrendered herself to a feeling of placid happiness superior, maybe, to the tumultuous ecstasy experienced by the young on first realizing that they are beloved. It does not become us to rudely lift the veil of the good lady's past history and perhaps expose the disappointments and heart-aches of early life. Years ago she may have "loved and lost." Who knows? Enough for us to learn from her air of serene tranquillity and the easily-interpreted language of her eyes when she turned them upon Black, that she loved that elderly gentleman with all her heart.

Caleb Black was not slow to reciprocate with all the fervor of his impulsive character, but circumstances seemed to be an almost insurmountable barrier between them. Leasem was absorbing nearly all the profits of his business. How could he, hampered as he was, suggest a matrimonial alliance with the trusting, generous Leah? Yet Destiny, Nature or Fate, call it what you will, impels people despite their reason. During one of the long walks and talks they now frequently had together, Caleb Black, carried beyond himself, deprecated his poverty and inability to supply the woman he yearned to make his wife with the luxuries of life.

"And you know who that woman is, do you

not, Miss Gray?" cried he, turning to her impatiently.

What answer could there be but the nestling of a flushed face against his shining broadcloth.

The silence that followed was more eloquent than words.

When Leah at last spoke it was to express one of those beautiful sentiments that never fail to lift us out of ourselves.

"You remember what Camille said, do you not?"

"You mean in the play?"

"In the play or in the book. I can repeat it word for word. Listen and never forget. 'Do you imagine that my happiness consists in the vanities which satisfy us when we love nothing, but which become of no value when we really do love?'"

"Blessed, blessed angel!" exclaimed the happy man, clasping her to his breast.

After that they spoke more frankly with each other and discussed their plans for the future without reserve.

"I shall work," said Leah very decidedly.

"No, not to be dreamed of," said Black.

"But, Caleb, darling, you know Julia Ward Howe's opinion," and she continued in a tone as if reading from a book, "The theory that women ought not to work is a corruption of the old aristocratic system. A respect for labor is the foundation of a true democracy."

"What we should like to suppress in this world,"

added Black, also giving a quotation as if from a book, "is the frivolous and ascetic woman. You are neither frivolous nor ascetic, and that is enough for me. Let the work be my care."

"But I may help you a little, may I not," said she.

"To a little sugar in my tea, most certainly," said he.

Leah laughed, the gay old fellow looked so pleased, and when she laughed she showed her teeth ever so little, and they were all her own and, elderly as she was, without any admixture of gold. Now that Leah was in a sort of a way his property, part of himself, ever in his thoughts day or night, Mr. Caleb A. Black was at no loss to discover new beauties and attractions about her. He greatly admired her feminine grace of movement. She was delightfully free from the gyrations of affectation, and there was an easy, unconscious grace of action marking her every motion, whether calm or excited, upon which the eye, and especially the eye of a fond lover, could feast without satiety.

"The eye must be fed," said Iago, that skilled but debased student of human nature. And, moreover the mind of Leah was so exquisitely pure and deeply permeated with religious fervor. Not an abtrusive religious fervor by any means, but the effects upon her were very beautiful, and illuminated her face at times till it shone like that of some saint of old. "Ah!" Black would say to himself intuitively, divining the secret and quoting from one of his favorites, "'If the religious life is

hidden, it is only as the regulator of a machine is hidden.'"

One day he came out bluntly with a fulsome eulogy of her character in this respect but utterly failed to persuade her that it was not a pleasing compliment prompted by the intensity of his affection for her. She smoothed his cheek with her hand and shook her head reprovingly.

"You have not read Goethe for nothing, Caleb, dear," said she, looking very wise. "You know he says, 'When we do not speak of things with a partiality, full of love, what we say is not worth being repeated.'"

It was in moments like these the old bookseller felt himself almost in heaven.

Leah's tastes and his own were so similar his life seemed already doubled. How freely he could talk with her, and what a patient Griselda she made, under his many monologues. He was not ashamed of the effect of lyrics upon him now, and the pathos in the lives of literary men, Johnson and Goldsmith for example, affected him to tears. Men of sympathetic natures live many lives, as they lose their own individuality, for the time being, in the persons and careers of their heroes. They feel as if the experiences of great men were added to their own, as it were, and their own experiences augmented by the accretions of biographical lore. In this way is not the spirit of the past perennial? It lives in the present and will live in the future. And if this were not so, how uncertain would be human achievement in

its effects upon the race. He was fond of recalling to her mind the stroll through Boston Common, on which occasion he had drawn so liberally, in his discourse, from Dr. Shurtleff, "of fragrant memory," to quote Pattee's happy expression. The remembrance gave Leah great pleasure, and how she laughed at the mistake she had made about Washington and the elm tree.

"But perhaps I know something that has escaped even your keen observation, Caleb, dear," said she, roguishly looking at him. "The story of Mary Chilton having been the first woman to leap ashore in 1620 is supposed by Pattee to be untrue."

Alas for poor Leah!

"Likewise the legend of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith," said Black, serenely.

It was no use trying to baffle this knowing old fellow.

"What book is that you have in your hand?" said he, one day.

"'Silas Marner,' Caleb, dear. I believe I have read it three times already."

"I have read it at least seven," said he, enthusiastically. "Brander Matthews is struck like myself with its beautiful simplicity of structure, 'a simplicity,' he says, 'not to be seen in any other of George Eliot's novels.'"

"What a noble drama it would make," suggested Leah, a little timidly.

"Aye! that it would," was the welcome response. "Think of its moving situations—the loss

of the gold, the finding of the golden-haired child, the appeal of the father to Silas nineteen years after, and her fidelity to the weaver and home associations. I know one actor at least who would be a preëminent delineator of the weaver's character."

"You are thinking of E. S. Willard," said Leah.

"You must be a thought reader," said Caleb, smiling.

"I wish I was a thought reader," said Leah, earnestly.

"Why?" said Black, benignly.

"Because I should then be able to find out about the Leasem mortgage. You are so determined not to tell me."

"My honor is pledged. Nothing short of that would justify my declining to satisfy your very natural curiosity."

"Caleb, dear, it is very provoking. You assure me that you had nothing to do with it; that it was some unknown prince, some Haroun Alraschid in disguise, and leave me to torment myself with futile speculations. And, Caleb, dear, there is nothing but mystery everywhere. It is in the air. The Browns have received all their papers from some unknown friend, and owe Mr. Leasem nothing."

"It is the Caliph's work again," said Black, solemnly.

"Well, they think it is Mr. Whyte," said Leah, "and they are eating him up in gratitude. I think our charming little Euphemia will marry him."

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"She will marry the wrong man, then," said Black.

"What! Do you know about that affair, too?" said Leah, very much surprised.

"It so happens, my dearest Leah, that I count among my acquaintances one of the noblest of men, and I should ill merit the confidence he reposes in me were I to chatter like a magpie about what, for reasons of his own, he wishes preserved sacred."

"Was there ever such an impenetrable tangle," cried Leah. "Why, the Browns are sure it is young Whyte."

"And I am sure it is not," repeated Black. "But more than that I cannot tell you."

"I shall lose no time in undeceiving Mrs. Brown, who has time and again assured me that the young man has rendered her this service in so delicate and chivalrous a manner that the mere hint of her obligations to him frightens him away."

"Well, on careful consideration," said Black, slowly, "I think it would be only right, since I have said so much that I ought not to have said, to say what I ought to say; and that is, don't let Mrs. Brown put the saddle on the back of the wrong horse, and allow that same undeserving quadruped to run away with our admirable Euphemia. I have an idea the Caliph Haroun Alraschid would not like it."

"The Caliph again," said Leah, laughing. "Oh, Caleb, dear, do you know who our real Caliph was? Yours and mine, I mean."

"You mystify *me* now," said Black.

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"Who but Leasen," said Leah, slyly. "Is it not to him we are indebted for our present happiness? Had I not owed him the money and been unable to pay it I would not have spoken to you by the elm tree and you would not——"

Leah felt the color suffusing her cheeks and paused.

"Curious," said Black softly, as if talking to himself, "I did not think of looking at it in that way."

CHAPTER IX

THE bonds of Shylock and Cupid play leading parts in the affairs of humanity. Well is it for the happiness of the good people we have been trying to describe in these pages that, by the aid of Black's potent Caliph, the bonds of one were exchanged for those of the other.

It will have been perceived that there is small attempt at plot in this story, and the reader can easily conceive that the serious assertions of Leah and the artful gossip of Sophy would soon open the Browns's eyes to the mistake they had fallen into with regard to Thorndyke. It was awkward for the poor fellow, but in the hands of the wily milliner young Whyte was as putty, and speedily consoled.

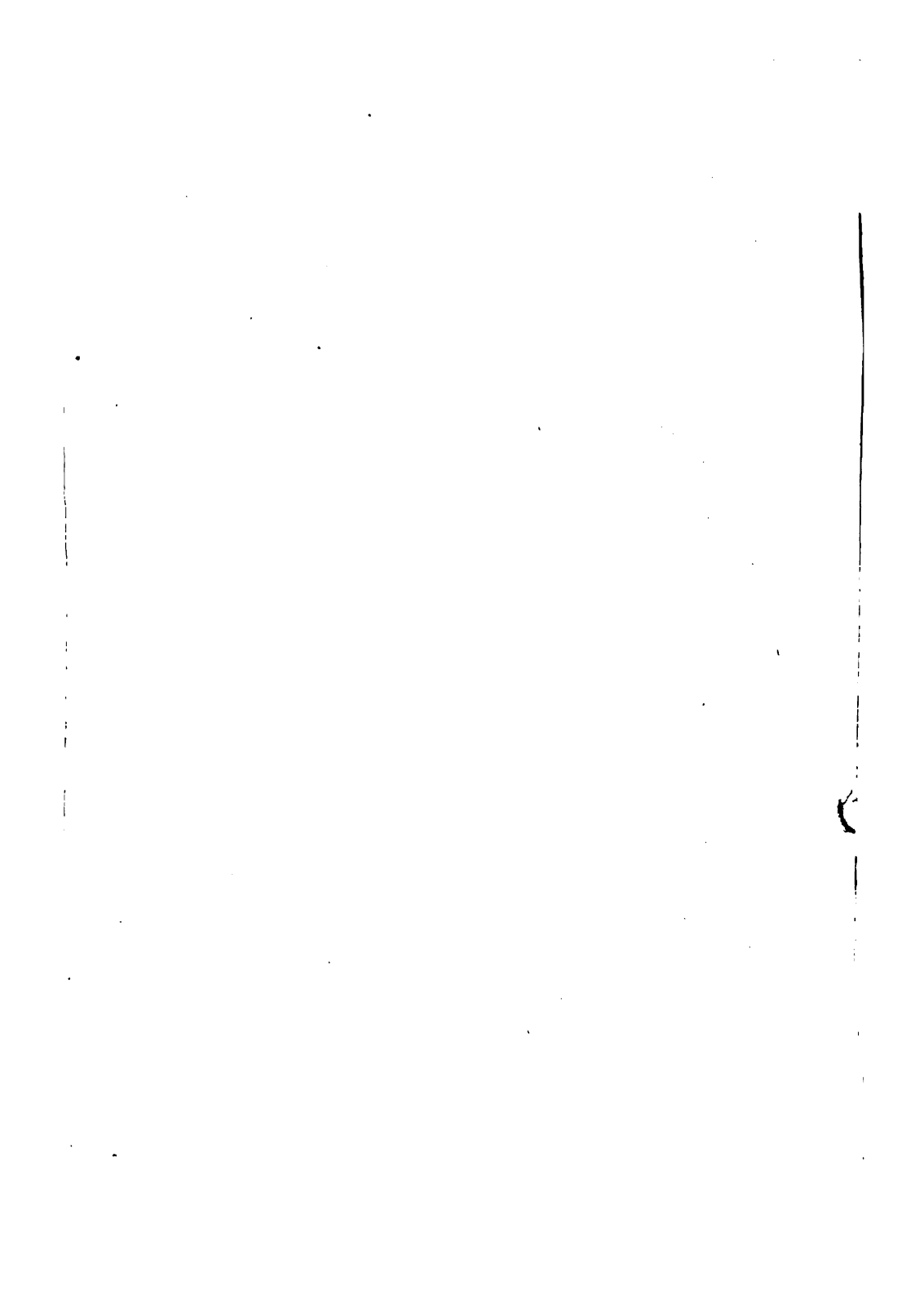
He never proposed to Euphemia. Sophy decided he had better not, and he dared not question her judgment; besides which he had been getting to feel a little bored with the selections from "Browning," varied with instrumental music far removed from the "Jolly Dogs are We" style of thing. The dashing deportment of Sophy and her cajoleries also had the most marked influence upon him, and Euphemia, the prim but dainty Euphemia, was left to exercise her metronomical skill upon his fortunate rival, the bearded man, who had taken his place in that softest of easy chairs and coziest of parlors.

Leah was quite in love with the arrangement

and helped her "dear old Caleb" to promote it with all her might, for hath not match-making charms of its very, very own? The M. I. B. G., fully alive to their good work done in his behalf, came down handsomely, but with characteristic delicacy, with the practical recognition of these, to him, priceless services, and neither Black nor Leah were any more in the power of Leasem. Not content with this exhibition of generosity, he came to the assistance of Mr. Thorndyke B. Whyte, on hearing of his pecuniary embarrassments, with such liberal aid that he benefitted not only that young gentleman but also Sophy, who came in for a share of it in the usual way, after the words, "Let no man put asunder" had put an end to her "friendly understandings."

Galen and Rondy danced at the wedding in the most volatile of spirits; and dear old Mrs. Brown, no longer in the grasp of Shylock, is about as contented a mortal as exists on this planet of worry and Leasems.

THE END.





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